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N O E L

AN EPIC IN TEN CANTOS

BY GILBERT CANNAN

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PART THREE

CANTOS III AND IV

LONDON

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CANTO THREE



CANTO III

LONDON's my subject, London of the twilight
Of gods and kings and empires and the causes
For which men died in times before the dry light
Of commerce withered life. My Muse here pauses,
And dreads what London's gloom will do with my light.
But I don't care. The maker of my laws is
My conscience, and my Muse must stand with me
To watch the years of dying liberty.

Dear Muse, I know you long to take a flight
Above Parnassus on my poet's wings,
And so you shall when through the dreadful night
The dawn begins to peep and linnet sings
The new-born day. But first I have to fight
To cleanse my soul for what the new day brings.
O may it bring some joy on hellish earth
Where poets pine and bring no song to birth!

Katje had vanished. London was a tomb
Walled in with laws and law-books for my hero,
A dank and dark and dreary catacomb,
Where pleasure kept his spirits down at zero,
With tasteless work to aggravate his gloom,
And no relief save Carton, Jones, Pinero,
The ghostly drama of a ghostly time
All virgin-white with boredom's wintry rime.

O Kensington, O Bayswater, O Jail,
 Where all a nation's life and power are pent
 In padded ease, where spirits faint and fail
 And minds are drugged with so much increment
 Of wealth that, like the blubber of a whale,
 Keeps out the cold and in the discontent
 Which raises human beings to the level
 Where they're a match for life, God and the devil.

Polite the dinners, more polite the balls,
 Polite the fashionable music played,
 Polite the art, polite the hush that falls
 As titled ladies tastefully arrayed
 Arrive to dine or make their round of calls
 And ply the scandal which is all their trade.
 Polite their cunning and polite the skill
 With which they push their husbands through the mill.

From stifling house to stifling house in clothes
 Most elegant went Noel, though he knew
 Not why. Upon his head a shiny hat, his toes
 In shiny shoes, and gloves of dove-like hue
 Upon his hands, and linen white as snows
 Upon a mountain—Noel stood to view
 A dandy, like a wild rose in a green-house.
 The richest mansion seemed to him a mean house.

“This cannot last!” he gasped. “This cannot last!
 This gross plum-pudding of a life must break.”
 He saw how men and women were held fast
 In keeping up appearance for the sake
 Of keeping up appearance, till a blast
 Of war or revolution should awake
 The minds so dull, the souls so somnolent
 In West End London comfortably pent.

They slept through war, they slumbered into peace
 While men were slain to keep the drowsy spell
 Unbroken and the ninety-nine years' lease
 Of Privilege unmortgaged, though all hell
 Should rise to bid such fatal stillness cease.
 The stillness rippled as a pebble fell,
 The stone of death which broke at last the scum,
 What time the air thrilled with the muffled drum.

Ind. Imp. et Dei. Gra. Fid. Def. et Brit.
 Omn. Reg. Victoria, like Mrs Jones
 The washerwoman, had at last to fit
 Into the end of all. She died. Her bones
 Must mingle with the earth to make of it
 New life to blossom from the barren stones.
 She died at peace, the famous Peace Britannic
 Imposed upon a universe volcanic.

She died at peace in sainted widowhood
 As she had lived. Her Virtue was so rare
 It hid all Evil in her realm, and Good
 Had reigned supreme for sixty years. (Compare
 Lord Tennyson with Shakespeare.) Virtue stood
 A marble monument against the wear and tear
 Of sixty years of squalid bargaining
 To make an Empire in a wedding ring.

She died in peace, but she had been so old
 So long that no one thought that she could die.
 Queens live for ever in the stories told
 To keep the gleam within a baby's eye.
 Yet queens are women and they cannot hold
 Their Virtue when the King of Death goes by.
 O day of wrath! O days and nights of mourning!
 Death for a moment stopped the people's yawning.

An old, old woman's body in a box
 Is drawn through London's streets, and tier on tier
 The people gape and gaze while Death unlocks
 The prison-gates of Virtue and Austere
 Morality, which made the spirit *Vor*
Et preterea nihil. On the bier
 Were drawn the keys of England's island prison
 Whereon at last had Freedom's sun arisen.

The wan light of this long-belated dawn
 Shone through the London murk upon a show
 Unrivalled. From remotest earth were drawn
 Into the trough of destiny (to throw
 Their princeliness before the bourgeois yawn)—
 Kings, emperors and rajahs, bending low
 Their heads in grief before the death of royalty
 Which also meant the obsequies of loyalty.

Sir Somerset and Noel in Whitehall,
 Hard by the place where royal Charles was slain,
 With mixed emotions watched the festival
 Of Death, who drenches life with slanting rain.
 Sir Somerset enjoyed the funeral
 As such, but Noel's heart with sudden pain
 Perceived the much that with the aged Queen
 Went down and was as it had never been.

They saw the heaped-up rows of pallid faces,
 The crowds fenced in with soldiers and police,
 While all the human pageant slowly paces
 In mourning for King Sailor Billy's niece.
 Her grooms and lackeys, secretaries, *saises*,
 All play their part in the romantic piece.
 But if there was a hero of that day
 'Twas Kaiser Wilhelm come his grief to pay.

The greatest actor on the human stage,
 Self-hypnotised, could hypnotise the throng
 To gaze in awe upon his equipage
 And uniform, to marvel and to long
 That this symbolic figure of the age
 Should be its Knight to free the world from wrong.
 A Parsifal was Wilhelm in his mail.
 With such an audience he could not fail.

So Wilhelm's art out-Beerbohmed Beerholm Tree.
 Majestic, bowed, upon his steed he sat
 A man of marble, mute humility
 In royal grief. The proletariat
 Had more than they had bargained for to see.
 This marble monarch was worth gazing at.
 Aye, every inch a king, a dramatist,
 Theatrical emotions and mailed fist.

O Kaiser, Kaiser Wilhelm, did you dream
 That all your glory slipped into the tomb
 With grandmamma, and as she died the gleam
 Of liberty shot through her kingdom's gloom,
 And all the eager hopes that ever teem
 In human thought had ripened in the womb
 Of Time. O Kaiser, you were riding to
 Your grave that day although you little knew.

Salute the ages dead, the gathered treasure
 Nailed up in a box. Salute the grave
 Now dug to hold the ancient world whose measure
 At last is taken when no power can save
 It from the lust grown from its cult of pleasure,
 Which set at naught the sainted and the brave.
 Salute the nineteenth century whose whoredom
 Had gathered up a thousand ages' boredom.

Disgust and pity choked up Noel's breast
 To see so many thousands mourn for one,
 That one a symbol of the pious zest
 With which so many villainies were done
 By Palmerston and Dizzy and the rest
 Who found in Empire their religion
 And used the widowed Virtue of the Queen
 To keep the greenhorn British public green.

Disgust and pity irked him till he felt
 This was the end, the end made visible
 Of all the secret woe that Empire spelt
 For nameless millions burning in the hell
 Of their docility. And as the veldt
 Had swallowed up the lives of those who fell
 To bring forth gold, so here in England death
 Had ta'en the power that robbed them of their breath.

His thoughts now hovered round the central figure,
 The Kaiser Wilhelm, and there seemed to grow
 An aureole that made him still loom bigger.
 Symbolical and superhuman. So
 He rode towards the grave that Death, the digger,
 Had made for him and all his tribe to know,
 The tinsel ending of a golden dream
 Destroyed by Life where things are what they seem.

This drapery of death was so appalling
 To Noel that his world came crashing down,
 And with a dizzy sense of swiftly falling
 He felt that in the sea of life must drown
 His dearest hopes, since there was no forestalling
 The tragedy that hung o'er London Town.
 The muffled drums and grunting bands went by
 Bemoaning more than fallen majesty.

"With Virtue dead, then Love is dead, and dead
 Is Fancy." Such strange words as these took shape
 And knocked upon his emptied heart, and said
 In whispers, as his mind began to gape
 And crack beneath the pressure of his dread,
 "So lovelessly died Tarquin for his rape."
 Such twisted thoughts took shape within his brain
 As aged him years within a moment's pain.

But in that moment clear as dewdrop in
 A buttercup his thought within his soul
 Became a dream that sped his heart to win
 The grace that was his nature's destined goal,
 The grace that triumphs nobly over sin
 In suffering, and gives no petty toll
 To smug morality whose right and wrong
 Squeeze human hearts and break in them their song.

The Kaiser dwindled into something less
 Than man. The potentates and rajahs grew
 Downwards to dwarfish heights. The throng and press
 Expanded and cast off its sable hue
 To blaze in colour as its souls address
 Themselves to grace their lost life to renew.
 The pomp of royalty goes down to dust,
 The people's soul shakes off its age-long rust.

And Noel knew that no one knew but he
 The miracle enkindling all humanity
 Now it had broken with the century
 Which gloried in its virtuous inanity,
 Its hypocritic cult of liberty,
 But held the people slaves to its urbanity
 And substituted for the Christian myth
 The economic rules of Adam Smith.

Sir Somerset remarked that it was time
 To eat, and Noel's dewdrop vision faded,
 And left him slipping back into the slime
 Of London life, in work and pleasure jaded,—
 Unpromising material for rhyme,
 So thoroughly was human life degraded
 To appetites and senses, and no more
 With mind and soul left hungering and sore.

"My boy," said old Sir Somerset, "the King
 Will stir us up and we shall have a Court
 That will not slay our pleasures on the wing."
 And Noel nodded gloomily. That sort
 Of leering hope was most unpromising
 To him who saw in Britain now a fort
 Where Liberty at last would be defended,
 Now that the day of kings and priests was ended.

Sir Somerset that day had caught a cold.
 His homage to the Age Victorian
 Cost him his life. No more would he unfold
 To Briton, Brahmin and West Indian
 The mysteries of tort or copyhold,
 No more be marked as the most learned man
 About the Temple or the Law Courts. He
 Left Noel as his only legatee,

A house in Kensington, a shooting box
 In Scotland, slum property in Leeds,
 A hundred thousand pounds in divers stocks
 And shares, rooms full of books and screeds
 Of manuscripts, an essay on "John Knox
 And Education," mortgages and deeds,
 Insignia of orders, and degrees,
 A cellar full of port, the cellar's keys,

Plate, furniture, and linen ; a collection
 Of drawings by Rossetti and Burne-Jones
 And Madox Brown, in whom Art reached perfection
 For old Sir Somerset, who spoke of them in tones
 Of awe, as one might speak of a connection
 With saints and angels on their golden thrones.
 Pre-Raphaelite, the Chelsea coterie
 In Art were Noel's uncle's Q.E.D.

With wealth, a famous name, a hero's lustre
 About his parentage, romance to give
 The final touch to Noel's noble muster
 Of qualities entitling him to live
 The gay existence of a London buster,
 One lack made all his fortune like a sieve
 Through which his passion trickled. He had lost
 The love wherewith he could his fate accost.

His mother wished her boy to make a stir,
 To marry some fair maid who, being trained
 In social climbing, would comply with her
 In making Noel do what he disdained
 And lick the boots of those who can confer
 Position on the rich whose wealth has gained
 For them the outer courts of the great portals
 For ever closed to poor but honest mortals.

Mammas propose, but married women dish
 Both them and God's disposal of young men.
 In London, though a bachelor may wish
 To live like a well-ordered citizen,
 He's like an open oyster to the fish
 In clusters waiting for the moment when
 The hapless mollusc leaves himself exposed—
 A swoop, a gulp, the oyster's tale is closed.

Wealth, fame, distinction or an honoured name,
 These women covet as they ache for pearls
 To make themselves successful in the game
 From which they are excluded as mere girls
 Until they're married, when they lose all shame,
 And as the Season seizes them and whirls
 Them on, they gather up their stolen spoils :
 Clothes, money, jewels, men within their toils.

Good-naturedly, as Ellen drove him on,
 Young Noel let himself be drawn into
 The rout and half forgot his vision,
 So many were the pleasures of the few.
 His love with Katje seemed for ever gone.
 It mattered little what he chose to do.
 He danced and dined and stayed in country houses,
 Indulging there in sundry wild carouses.

His friends were guardsmen, and he stayed with them,
 Played polo, gambled, ragged and bullied toughs
 Gazetted by mistake, nor tried to stem
 The wildness that recalled to mind the roughs
 Let loose the night that broke the British phlegm,
 And set the nation turning back its cuffs
 To take it out of someone for the slight
 The Boers had put upon Great Britain's might.

The King, as Noel's uncle prophesied,
 Installed a Court of Jewish millionaires
 Who saw good business in such regicide
 And shortly held the nation by the hairs.
 It had to take what *they* chose to provide.
 Low life they let appear above the stairs,
 And Jews who'd gone to Africa by steerage
 Now bought themselves a place in Britain's Peerage.

With low life surging like a dirty flood,
 It seemed that none now cared to stay at home.
 Unresting feet ploughed through the city's mud.
 At night the lights put out the starry dome,
 And none had leisure now to chew the cud
 Of thought, but all were drawn into the foam
 And dirty froth churned by the brimming river
 That drowned the landmarks of old days for ever.

But on his raft of money Noel floated
 And unmoved saw Old England slowly drown.
 Each Honour as it sank he duly noted
 And doffed his hat to its decayed renown,
 The Monarchy, the House of Lords, the doted
 Authority that governed London Town,
 The ancient laws, the constitution crumbling,
 The ruined fabric tottering and tumbling.

And he enjoyed it much as he enjoyed
 In Africa the sight of ant-heaps washed
 Away by rain. If it could be destroyed,
 If it was so defiled and so deboshed
 That only money kept its parts upbuoyed,
 Then it was surely time its power was squashed
 Before corruption spread to bring dismay
 To life elsewhere more worthy of the day.

This was his deep impression, but he needed
 A knowledge more precise before he plunged.
 His mother worried much, and often pleaded
 With him to rid himself of those who sponged
 Upon his generosity. He weeded
 His large acquaintance out but always lunged
 Away from marriage, which his mother hoped
 Would settle him. He would not, and she moped.

He said : " Dear mother, mother of my soul,
 Who made me free and brought me up to hate
 The code of modern morals and the whole
 Fantastic fabric of the modern state,
 Now leave me free to drive towards my goal,
 To be the lord and master of my fate,
 And not the puppet of the notoriety
 Which animates this half-effete society.

" In Africa we kindled to the sun
 And from the earth drew sweetest nourishment
 For body, mind and soul, but here is none.
 Here are all three in huddled masses pent.
 The Trinity is never clearly One.
 Its force is lost in fruitless argument.
 And marriage here as far as I can see
 Means Woman added to the Trinity."

Strange words that Ellen hardly understood.
 A pardoned rebel, she could tolerate
 The very things, in her rich widowhood,
 That, as a wife, she fiercely used to hate,
 And even in the vilest saw some good.
 She did not wish her son to isolate
 Himself when all the world was at his nod
 And he could live at peace with man and God.

The house in Kensington was open day
 And night, and guardsmen, barristers and actors,
 Young literary men all whiled away
 Their too great leisure. Sons of rich contractors,
 At Eton varnished, brought their ladies gay
 To drink Champagne and Cognac, those great factors
 In every walk of moneyed London life,
 The rich man's Beer, for which he starves his wife.

And soon the house in Kensington outvied
 The Continental as a rendezvous.
 It seemed to Ellen social suicide,
 But Noel said: "In Britain one must do
 As Britons do." Heart-broken, Ellen cried:
 "They are not frank, and with your frankness you
 Will come to ruin. These poor wretches know
 The line that's drawn and farther do not go."

The women tried in vain to catch their young
 Mæcenæas, so romantic, handsome, rich.
 In deed so reckless, yet he was in tongue
 Most guarded, and the women knew not which
 He was, a cynic or an idiot who flung
 His wealth about to ease the spending itch.
 He moved among them silent, pale and kind,
 And hated most in them their lack of mind.

But nowhere could he ease the aching passion
 That throbbed in him and twinged for lack of dreams
 And purpose that should dominate the fashion,
 Not follow it and pleasure's fitful gleams.
 "Give me an aim," he cried, "and I will dash on
 Until 'tis won, and beauty no more seems
 To be, but is." His cry of passion uttered
 What every heart in London inly muttered.

He loved this London, sprawling, helpless, mean,
 So accidental, vague, so kindly-cruel,
 So comic that the very air's serene
 With humour, the surprising lovely jewel
 Within the toad-like head. O! ne'er was seen
 So vast a joke, and this was all the fuel
 That Noel's passion found in London's magic.
 A joke! The flower of generations tragic.

Its perfume sweetened all, the Jewish Court,
 The ponderous submission to the law,
 The law's practitioners, the last resort
 Of scoundrels, patriotism, the raw
 And raucous newspapers, the lowest sort
 Of entertainments, the undue awe
 Accorded to play-actors, journalists
 And men whose fame was in their padded fists.

When Wordsworth lived the nation loved its Tupper.
 Now Tuppers bloomed and Wordsworth was there none.
 The feast of letters looked like a Last Supper
 Without its central figure. There'd begun
 An inky orgy which begrimed the upper
 And educated classes till they run
 And read, and run, and reading run until
 They have nor mind, nor hope, nor faith, nor will.

This was the greatest joke of all that men
 With Shakespeare, Milton, Newton, Shelley,
 Keats, Johnson, Dryden, Fielding, William Penn,
 Swift and Defoe to guide them should a belly
 Full of wind prefer, and breaking from their den,
 Their towns so reeking, smoke-begrimed and smelly,
 Turn to a Harmsworth as their guide and friend,
 To learn destruction when 'twas time to mend.

And no one saw the joke but Noel, whom
 It hurt and yet delighted. No one minded.
 And no one saw the clouds that he saw loom
 Out of this joke, for everyone was blinded
 By what seemed light after the three years' gloom
 Of war, for no one wished to be reminded
 Of that mistake which almost turned the joke
 Into a nightmare which the sleeper woke.

"There'll be no war as long as we've a king
 Like good King Edward." There'll be war
 As long as there are Harmsworths mafficking
 From day to day in print and Britons are
 So foolish as to think that when they sing
 Their *Rule, Britannia* there's a special star
 To which their waggon's hitch'd to pull them through
 And keep them ignorant of what they do.

To see the soft spring light on London's spires,
 Or touch to opal waves on tidal Thames,
 Green buds on blackened trees! In all the shires,
 Though every one contains a thousand gems
 Of landscape, nothing so fulfils desires
 Of hearts for home as spring with diadems
 Of green and gold renewing ecstacy
 In ancient London's heaped-up misery.

Perceiving this at last in Noel broke
 His frozen passion into streams of laughter
 Delirious, and the joy in him awoke
 And made him see at last what he was after,
 To see that London's grim and deadly joke
 Should blossom into joy to thwart the grafter,
 The millionaire, the hack, who use the Press
 To draw their profit from the public mess.

Perceiving this, to Ellen's joy, he cast out
 The rowdy crew who battened on his folly.
 He said he wanted something that would last out
 The seasons from the primrose to the holly.
 "I'll be," he cried, "a real iconoclast out
 Of joy and not from bilious melancholy."
 But in his image-breaking first went down
 Poor Ellen's dreams for him in London Town.

A Mrs Clement-Cluny smelt him out
 As cats smell fish, and filched him like a cat ;
 And of her aims gave him so little doubt
 That he'd no notion what she would be at.
 She took him everywhere with her about,
 And made him help to furnish her new flat.
 The story is so usual, so trite,
 'Tis hardly worth the time it takes to write.

A nation must be judged by what it makes
 Of women, and the Clement-Clunys swarm
 In London Town : an empty heart that aches,
 A busy mindless brain, a body warm
 With sensual desire, an eye that fakes
 The light of passion, promising a storm
 Where there is only darkness and the dust
 Of egoism crumbled into lust.

"Let her not draw thee with her eyelids." Old
 Advice from Solomon the Wise, but still
 Adulterous women keep their strangle-hold
 On life, and still keep stealthy watch to kill
 Youth, charm and force and all that makes men bold
 To follow dreams and passion's windy will.
 "Youth, youth, be mine," cry women as they fade.
 Their touch on youth makes life itself decayed.

"Youth, youth, be mine," and chivalrous bright youth
 Hears in the cry a lady in distress.
 "Be young with me," and melting into ruth
 Youth rushes down into the sordid mess
 That women make through being dead to truth,
 To beauty blind in their vast selfishness.
 So Noel rushed and let his springful blood
 Be sucked out by a vampire in the mud.

A vampire Mrs Clement-Cluny was,
 But very charming, and good company.
 She knew her world and was a candid glass
 To all its tricks and bland hypocrisy.
 Musicians, artists, actor-people pass
 Through lives like hers and learn the knavery
 Without which Art's forgotten in the race
 For good positions in the market-place.

So charming was she that her lovers stayed
 To be her friends when mimic love was broken
 And Fancy to another pasture strayed,
 Where eyes and lips say what is never spoken
 Since they can lie when tongue is still afraid.
 Yet friendliness with her remained the token
 Of some cold honesty that in her tricks
 Contrived a chill affection still to mix.

She lived for intrigue. Intrigue was to her
 A deeper passion than true love's delight.
 In politics, in art, the theatre,
 And even church affairs she'd won the right
 Of entry, and the rich financier,
 Her husband, who made money day and night,
 Consulted her and used her as his spy
 To watch each movement as it rippled by.

She travelled much and netted fish in Rome,
 In Paris and New York, and everywhere
 She went she made herself no less at home
 By intrigue than in London. By means fair
 Or foul she broached the brimming honeycomb
 Of luxury which she could not forbear.
 When youth is gone then luxury tastes bitter,
 And aching nerves begin to twinge and twitter.

"Youth, youth, be mine." Poor Noel, like so many,
 Obligated politely out of youth's excess,
 Instead of saying : "Madam, I've not any,"
 Like Simple Simon, to the wickedness
 Of such commercial persons. He'd the penny
 That Mrs Clement-Cluny wished to press
 Into the hand of Time, whose threatened scythe
 Made all the woman in her quail and writhe.

Fleeing from Time, she hurled herself at Noel
 With such a fury as to send him spinning.
 His faculty of reason could not go well
 Enough to help him baffle her in winning
 With arts that he knew not and she must know well
 In her much practice in that kind of sinning.
 Her desperation woke in him a kind
 Of passion which flamed up and made him blind.

He could not see that she had lost her soul
 And wanted his to keep herself from dying
 The moral death which gnawed a gaping hole
 In her existence. There was no denying
 The damage slowly wrought. Age like a mole
 Had sapped her, while her frenzied lust of buying,
 Intriguing, bargaining and pulling wires
 Had choked with dust her passion's waning fires.

The flame in Noel, steeped in Afric's sun,
 Blazed through her, borne on winds of chivalry.
 And what began as mild flirtation
 Grew to a storm of sensuality.
 But for the first time it contained no fun
 For her, so near to love and liberty,
 Yet too, too far, for living words he said
 But made her know how nearly she was dead.

With painted eyes and artfully tinged cheeks,
 A powdered bosom and a massaged throat,
 Hair subtly trimmed, hair washed until it reeks
 Of Morny, so she keeps herself afloat
 Upon hot youth's illusions. When he speaks
 Of love and freedom, all he says by rote
 She learns, and seems before himself to know
 The thing he means or meant once long ago.

Into her voice a flute-like note of joy,
 Or something very like it, throbs and thrills
 For him and him alone. Lest it should cloy
 It breaks into a happy song that spills
 In pleasure for her fire-bringing boy
 On anything that his attention fills—
 A glass of wine, a book, a merry tune,
 The muffins of a winter afternoon.

She gave him presents which he pocketed
 In half annoyance, for they did not bring
 The gift for which he'd raised her from the dead,
 The song of joy he hoped to hear her sing
 Before her chance of it for ever sped
 Down the dark void where each forgotten thing
 In darkness fades and dwindles into shame
 That it has lived but never burst in flame.

The obstinacy of his youth had mastered
 His will until, self-hypnotised, he strove
 To crack the lies with which her soul was plastered
 And make it yield to him its treasure trove.
 In vain, poor youth, he listened and at last heard
 Her true note through the spells she subtly wove,
 A harsh cracked note of jealous black despair
 That wheresoe'er she went befouled the air.

Jealous she was of everything he wore,
 Jealous of friends, acquaintances and kin,
 Jealous of deeds both after and before,
 Jealous of thought, of all he hoped to win,
 Jealous of all that hurt and made him sore,
 Jealous of love, that triumphed over sin
 And let him go in youth's abounding grace
 And left her gazing at her haggard face.

One day, returning home, he found a letter
 From Germany and opened it to find
 Five words from Katje saying she'd thought better
 Of her vowed silence. Darkness from his mind
 Rolled like a curtain. How could he forget her?
 "Katje, Katje, true love in you was kind.
 No jealous fury froze the living soul
 And turned the burning heart to blackened coal."

Alas! the letter gave him no address,
 No clue to where she was, save by the stamp.
 And that was Marburg. Five short words could bless
 His wounded spirit and relight the lamp
 Of love to show him all his soul's distress,
 This dark corruption of the cellar damp
 Of London love and mimicry of passion
 That women use to keep themselves in fashion.

"I'll tell her," Noel thought, with simple trust,
 "That I'm in love, and always shall be so,
 With Katje and I must do what I must.
 She's old enough to understand and know
 That we have had a strange spasmodic gust
 Which could not last, and she will let me go."
 So simply thought, so simply did the youth,
 Not having learned that women hate the truth.

He learned it quickly through the jealous fury
 With which the lady greeted what he said.
 A Russian pogrom in a shrieking Jewry
 Is not more cruel than the vengeance fed
 By Jealousy, and dramas at Old Drury
 Are tame beside the passions nourished
 By false love scorned when shown up by the true—
 Though happily such cases are but few.

But this was one of them, and Noel found
 Himself involved in such a knotted skein
 Of lives as made him feel the ground
 Must open up and swallow him. So vain
 Were all his efforts that he only wound
 The skein so tight that trebled was his pain,
 Quadrupled hers, who lost her ancient skill
 And, losing that, went fiercely out to kill.

Her memories of mimic love all faded,
 Her triumphs into yellow ashes crumbled,
 Each seemed a step by which her life had faded
 Into the nothing into which 'twas tumbled.
 Up to her knees in mud and mire she waded,
 And vowed she'd never rest until she'd humbled
 The man, the men who'd brought her down so low.
 Such debts as these she fiercely scorned to owe.

She'd pay in full, and Noel should not win
 The girl whose letter more to him had proved
 Than all the gifts she'd made to keep him in
 The state of mind that made him think he loved
 Herself, though the illusion was but thin.
 Swept on by fury mindlessly she moved,
 And quarrelled with her husband till he lost
 All patience, plunged and made her pay the cost.

He'd waited long for just such evidence
 As Noel's rashness gave him in full measure.
 He'd waited long and slyly. Common-sense
 Will always wait to steal upon the treasure
 Of joy when it ignores the moral fence
 Set up about the cheapest human pleasure.
 For common-sense, like Kipling with his lay,
 Cries ever to the joyous: "Pay, pay, pay."

Divorce, a scandal, withered Ellen's hope,
 And like a tigress in she plunged to save
 Her boy from toppling further down the slope
 On which he stood into the yawning grave
 Of loveless marriage, which had been the rope
 That twice had strangled her. A narrow shave
 Had Noel, for his chivalry inflamed
 Exposed him to the Cluny still untamed.

The Cluny thought she had him in her net,
 But Ellen tamed her, made her face the fact
 That she had got to take what she could get.
 Noel would see to it she never lacked
 And he would pay for having so upset
 Her apple-cart. The Cluny loudly smacked
 Her hands together, wept and ran through all
 Her repertoire of tricks theatrical.

But she accepted, and she disappeared,
 And Noel hugged his misery and shame,
 And counted up the wreckage where he feared
 Love's rose would never blossom like a flame.
 Why was it that his spirit always steered
 His life upon the rocks? What was this game
 Of London life, with complicated rules,
 To help the knaves to prey upon the fools?

And Mrs Clement-Cluny symbolised
 For him this London with its lingerie,
 Its restaurants, its misery disguised
 In splendour and respectability.
 A savage, bitter woman! So he sized
 His London up, and then he felt more free
 To start again upon the quest of joy
 That kept him through disaster still a boy.

"I will not marry," so he told his mother.
 "My heart is Katje's, and without my heart
 I will not share my life with any other.
 Though Katje's gone, yet I am still a part
 Of her, and Time will never, never smother
 The love we share and have shared from the start
 Of our young lives out there where love could be
 Before her people lost their liberty.

"In me I feel their freedom lives again,
 In me for her, and that is now my gesture,
 Here to revive the freedom that was slain
 In Africa. Though often I've distressed your
 Kind mother's heart, and tortured it with pain,
 I've not been blind, and often I have guessed your
 Distress, but now at last I see quite clearly
 What I've been up to when I've acted queerly.

"Don't be alarmed, dear mother, if I act
 More queerly yet. The river still must flow
 Upon its course, and every cataract
 Must reach smooth water somewhere. So I go
 Through London's fiction looking out for fact,
 The rock beneath the mountain's ice and snow.
 Dear mother, though I'm bitten by the frost
 Of Mrs Clement-Cluny, I'm not lost."

His mother kissed him and her benison
 She gave, and told her troubled heart the fault
 Was hers if any, and she counted on
 The lesson he had learned on this sharp halt.
 His happiness was all the sun that shone
 Upon her life, his joy its only salt.
 That he was in extremest misery
 She could not see, nor could he let her see.

The laws of England keep alive a race
 Of men as cloistered as the monks of old.
 The Temple is the still monastic place
 Where brains grow dry and hearts grow weak and cold,
 And withered passion greys the weary face
 That cannot kindle even over gold.
 This race of men can either earn no bread
 Or have no time or zest for being fed.

The glib of tongue go into politics.
 The thoughtful climb and cannot see beyond
 The Bench or County Court. The dullard sticks
 In chambers like a leaf upon a pond.
 Briefs, wigs and gowns, gowns, wigs and briefs, the tricks
 Of this most doleful trade make the despond
 In which is sunk Great Britain's ancient power
 On which the brewing storm-clouds loom and lour.

"Good-bye," said Noel to the Temple when
 His eyes were opened as I have narrated,
 Good-bye to all the grey and parchment men
 Upon whose life my pen has here dilated ;
 Good-bye to briefs and dust, good-bye again
 To hopes of being dull and celebrated
 For helping knaves to circumvent the law
 And honest men to writhe beneath its paw.

Good-bye, dear Law Courts, with your empty hall
 Symbolical of Nothing. O good-bye !
 Great Rufus, greater Danckwerts, Marshall Hall
 And Eldon Bankes, long may your greatness lie
 Unruffled : and, ye Benchers, ye who call
 Young men within the Bar that youth may die,
 A long farewell. You fatten in your Inns
 Upon an ancient nation's hoard of sins.

For what is law but sin legitimate
 By purchase ? Said Noel : " I will sin,
 If sin I must, as I will love and hate,
 In Freedom, and that Freedom will I win
 By no vile homage to a tricked-out State,
 Through dusty lawyers who have wriggled in
 To what is left of a forgotten Church ;
 Dead long ago and long left in the lurch.

" Farewell, you lawyers, who attempt to rule
 Without authority but by your wits.
 Farewell, a long farewell, another school
 I seek that teaches wisdom unto its
 Devout by holding up the clever fool
 To scorn before the throne where Wisdom sits.
 That throne's the heart of man, whose majesty
 Gives man's usurping code of Law the lie."

The corpse of poor Sir Somerset within
 Its grave must then have turned to hear his heir
 So speak, as though the Law itself were sin,
 But so it is, as Noel in his debonair
 And happy insight knew. He gave a grin
 To think how he'd have made his uncle's heir
 Stand up on end to hear such blasphemy
 Upon the Law's respectability.

The Lord Chief Justice and the Chancellor,
 The Master of the Rolls, Lords Justices,
 The Justices and the Solicitor-
 And the Attorney-General—are these
 Well-paid officials really hired for
 Their kindly keeping of our consciences?
 Of course not. They're to oil the wheels for us
 To sin and have the minimum of fuss.

Good-bye then to the Law. That is the net
 In which the British mind is caught and trapped.
 Not so my Noel. He could never let
 The thread between himself and Truth be snapped,
 Nor in the common falsehood could forget
 The Love that lived when lawful Britons scrapped
 The free Republics of the peaceful Dutch,
 Who gained their all in grimly losing much.

East from the Temple Fleet Street runs with ink,
 And eastward turned my Noel from the West,
 Where men in lewdness lose the power to think,
 And losing that are dead to all the rest.
 He could not learn like them to grin and blink
 At half the nation being dispossessed
 To choke the other half with monstrous wealth
 Which leaves no room for spiritual health.

He bought a paper which was derelict,
 And published it on Wednesday afternoons.
 His Editor he very wisely picked,
 One Rubio, who'd learned his job with Newnes
 And sickened of the daily interdict
 Upon his brains, that still had left some tunes
 Of wit and humour from the weary round
 That almost had his soul to Tit-Bits ground.

This man, a Jew, adored his master and
 Gainsaid him never when he had his fling,
 Although he could not wholly understand
 Why Noel should so joyfully take wing
 Upon his weekly flights when no demand
 Was made for thoughts as fragrant as the spring.
 But Noel loved his paper and the fun
 Of letting all his hoarded fancies run.

The paper fairly soon began to sell,
 And Rubio in time began to see,
 But faintly, what his master had to tell
 The British public in its majesty
 New-found and vaunted by the miracle
 Of papers printed by machinery
 In thousands, millions, scattered far and wide
 By special trains for mental suicide.

And Noel even met the great assassin
 Who murdered mind with cheaply printed sheets
 And would not suffer living thought to pass in
 To his excitement which not even Keats
 Or Shelley could have borne, though there was gas in
 Plenty in their day, 'gainst which the spirit beats
 Its power, its song until its music rises
 Above the din and heaven's gate surprises.

There was a frenzy in this man to get
 In Quick before the people could begin
 To think, for if they did they would upset
 The goal he'd marked out for himself to win,
 To hustle, hustle, and to know no let
 Until his house became the dorsal fin
 Upon the gudgeon's back. And no one knew
 But Noel what this man proposed to do.

To hustle, hustle, till his circulation
 Reached figures never dreamed of in the Street.
 To hustle, hustle, till the British nation
 Could hardly tell its brain-pan from its feet.
 To hustle, hustle, till in desperation
 The lawyers in the Temple would be beat.
 Aye, even they with all their supple cunning
 Would have to read as they were kept a-running.

This was a lovely game for Noel, this
 Perception of what things were going on
 Beneath the surface of great London's bliss
 In its Imperial religion,
 This solitary glimpse down the abyss
 Where never sun nor moon nor stars had shone,
 And all was dark as hell save for the heat
 That lit the lamps for Harmsworth in the Street.

From Westminster authority had fled
 Unto the Law, and lawyers made their profit
 Like leeches sucking at a man nigh dead
 Until the blast of war just blew them off it
 And blew them East where men who still saw red
 Pounced on the remnant, gulped and would not cough it
 Up. O lovely game, O grimmest of grim jokes,
 What time the unled herd sweats, steams and smokes.

And Noel with his paper pointed out
 These things, but no one heeded what he cried.
 At Westminster was gathered up a rout
 To wrangle over details and the pride
 Of certain classes to maintain without
 Suspecting that the thing they loved had died.
 The stair that lawyers climbed had broken down,
 Now none could win but all must steal renown.

None had renown by birth ; that much was settled.
 And none was great but by the British Press.
 " 'This cannot work,' " said Noel, somewhat nettled
 To see fools strutting in their paper dress.
 But work it did, and those too highly mettled .
 To cringe were voices in the wilderness.
 Voices there were of every timbre and tone,
 But none were heard but through the megaphone.

All night machines thumped out the daily hash.
 And brains were pulped to give it spice and bite.
 The newsboys through the traffic dart and dash
 To feed the gaping public's appetite
 For winners, crimes, at best a railway smash
 Now that the thrill of war is out of sight.
 All night machines grind out their late editions,
 As later on machines ground out munitions.

Bow down, bow down, before the god Machine
 That gathers up so many human lives
 And grinds to dust the glory that has been,
 And makes men live like slavish bees in hives :
 Like wretched bees who've hived without a queen,
 So that their laws are manacles and gyves
 About them, since they cannot face the light
 To rise superbly on the marriage flight.

This then was England, a poor hive of drones,
 Drone, droning on in blind obedience,
 Like a poor beggar hammering his stones
 Eight hours a day against a wooden fence,
 To keep existence in his skin and bones
 And spend on beer his hard-earned eighteen-pence.
 Now Noel heard the megaphonic voice
 And knew that poor old England had no choice.

Katje had said the dead would rise and cry
 For vengeance to be wrung a thousand-fold,
 To pay the cost of Britain's victory.
 Would Death then cry his vengeance on the old ?
 This poor old man, too old for liberty,
 Too old for aught but to be bought and sold,
 Too old for aught but for his meagre cheer
 In selling labour for a pint of beer.

Ind Coope is good, and Worthington is good,
 And Bass is elegant, and Allsopp's mild,
 A carter's pint is always understood
 Where argument and sense seem vague and wild.
 Beer is the British worker's homely food,
 Therein are contradictions reconciled.
 Beer, glorious beer, is more than food for thought,
 'Tis thought itself, the thing that feareth naught.

The solid thought of Britain is all beer.
 Outside there are anæmic nimble minds
 Which waste themselves in their attempt to steer
 Their little boats through all the shifting winds
 What time the barrel-hulk contrives to veer
 In solemn sluggish safety through all kinds
 Of weather. I can't keep this up for long.
 My Muse says: "Poet, tune thy soul to song."

I'll sing of beer, but think it I will not,
 Nor will my Noel, as we go up West
 To find out what there is to stop the rot
 Among the educated whose behest
 Has still some weight until the iron's hot
 Wherewith the rich shall blind the dispossessed.
 Did no one know what villainy was brewing,
 Or what in all this vat of life was stewing ?

No. No one. Those were days of empty fooling
 In life as on the stage, where Bernard Shaw
 Began to put the nation through its schooling
 For its revolt—in time—against the law
 And rulers who had no idea of ruling
 And yet could not suspect there was a flaw
 In their capacity which won them votes
 On which their thought still dwells and fondly dotes.

Wast never at the Court? Then thou art damned.
 With Rubio my Noel paid his court
 To something almost art, where others shammed
 And made the theatre the last resort
 Of gambling commerce. Here the plays were crammed
 With so much styleless talk that the report
 Of wit in it was like a pistol shot
 Which galvanised what else was platform rot.

It came from much debating in societies.
 Behind it was a life of scores of scores,
 And Bernard Shaw topped all the notorieties
 And skittles played with old established bores
 Who writhed beneath his impudent impieties
 Which broke upon their orchestrated snores.
 They growled and grumbled, but at last success
 Made popular the famous G. B. S.

O Pierrot! O Faun! So Walkley wrote.
 O mischievous, say I, O wanton wag
 Upon whose wit no other mind can float!
 O solitary boy set out to drag
 The over-grown-up English down, thy note
 Was still too thin to reach them as they lag
 Behind the world in art and thought and drama
 Through gazing on their Empire's panorama.

O Pierrot! O Faun! O Irish Bishop!
 (For such you might have been) I here salute
 You as my vagrant pen runs on to dish up
 The work that won you fame and good repute.
 You angled long. At last you brought your fish up
 And bought yourself another Jaeger suit.
 With *Man and Superman* you conquered men,
 With help from Granville Barker and Vedrenne.

The Court was like a little winking star
 In evening darkness in an autumn wood
 Full of corruption, where the lichens mar
 The sturdy trees that have for ages stood.
 But mildew, moss and blighting fungus are
 Too strong at last. The earth has no more good
 To give in sap. Here life is at its ebb.
 The busy spider weaves its mourning web.

Clear dewy drops upon the web do shine,
 And shines the star through trellised twigs and leaves,
 But no wind stirs and no bird pours the wine
 Of song upon the soul as here it grieves.
 And through a mist of tears sees the divine
 Eternal message of the star that cleaves
 Its way through spider-threads that hold the wood
 In the foul spell of dank decrepitude.

The star winked laughter to the tortured soul
 To bid it not to weep and add its tears
 To so much moisture, but to play the rôle
 Assigned to humankind, beset with fears,
 Yet ever beckoned to the hero's goal,
 The silence broken only by the shears
 Of Clotho, and beyond that to the place
 Where stars are torches for a deathless race.

So Noel thought and so told Rubio,
 Who thought his master was a little cracked.
 "We laugh at this to stop the coming flow
 Of tears," said Noel. "We have been attacked
 By worse than mildew, and our spiders grow
 The fatter while our treasure is ransacked."
 Said Rubio: "This kills the problem play.
 Pinero, Jones & Co. have had their day."

"This is the knot," said Noel inly musing,
 "That ends a great tradition, this the laughter
 In which a man seeks comfort when he's losing
 His fight against the gods and sees thereafter
 No hope but that his sons may find amusing
 The story of his toil on which the grafter,
 The human spider, fastens in his labour
 To break the bonds that bind man to his neighbour."

A small event may in its hidden meaning
 Reveal an age, so Noel pondered long
 What time his soul was delicately weaning
 His passion's hope from London's motley throng
 Since now it had no hope of ever gleaning
 Therefrom its longed-for harvest of clear song.
 So round the Court my Noel's fancy played
 And had its purport measured up and weighed.

In wit as sore as that of Beaumarchais
 Great London gave its ghost, in stone its pride.
 The Mall with fancies haunted of the day
 Of Congreve, Wycherley and Vanbrugh died
 And was entombed in a Triumphal Way
 Down which King Edward and his Jews should ride
 In moneyed peace and popularity
 While England multiplied her ships at sea.

King Edward might forget the war, but not so
 The yeasty Harmsworth raising Standard Bread.
 The paper-eating Baronet had got so
 Enamoured of the map all painted red
 That he was out to keep the public hot so
 Long as there were pockets to be bled.
 He screamed for war with France, but Edward Rex
 Wooed Paris with his knowledge of the sex.

Vive Edouard le Roi, le gros bonhomme,
Vive l'Entente Cordiale, à bas Fashoda,
Conspuez Harmsworth, who with great aplomb
 Thinned down his blood with quantities of soda,
 Seltzer and blood! He hurled his paper bomb
 Into the Rhine, the Mosel and the Oder.
 But as it did not help his circulation
 He turned and fawned upon the British nation.

Great Britain, Greater Britain, Greatest Nation,
 The grandeur that was Greece has passed away,
 The glory that was Rome is now damnation,
 The French won't fight for they have had their day.
 Someone must fight to give us a sensation
 And "Rule, Britannia" all the world shall say
 Upon its knees beside the open graves
 That Britain digs for those who touch the waves.

"My Rubio," said Noel, "will you please
 Print in my paper that we now enjoy
 The *smallest* circulation of all these
 Unworthy sheets which so much time employ
 In turning blood to ink, the moon to cheese,
 The sun to gold, the earth to its alloy.
 We have the smallest circulation, but
 We keep tradition's thread from being cut."

"You'll lose your money," said the cautious Jew.
 "That's my affair," said Noel; "if I lose it
 I'll earn my living as I ought to do.
 My money's mine, but I will not abuse it
 Or hand it over to the nameless crew
 Who say they know much better how to use it,
 But let Great Britain grow into a slum
 Where men grow pale that great machines may hum."

Said Rubio: "'Tis vain to fight machines,
 For they will run while there are lives to feed them,
 And men must live although they foul the scenes
 Where men and women loved of old to breed them.
 You thank your stars that you have private means,
 The time may come when you will sorely need them.
 Don't waste them now, a hundred quid a week.
 When money talks, 'tis vain for men to speak."

In London money chattered like a grove
 Of apes, a never-ceasing, rising, falling chatter.
 Like sucking waves upon a pebbled cove
 The tide of money crushed the brain to batter.
 And Noel, though most manfully he strove,
 Found that his thoughts were growing ever flatter,
 And flat his paper fell as week by week
 He struggled on in human tones to speak.

He ruined Rubio by making him
 Acquire the art of thinking ere he wrote :
 For Rubio to write with greater vim
 Had learned to write quite mindlessly by rote
 What Newnes designed to catch the public's whim.
 His work was no more than a paper boat
 Put out to circle, dart and skim and sink—
 A waste of time, and paper, pen and ink.

So London floundered in an inky sea,
 And hearts were cold, minds starved while men still looked
 To Westminster to give their liberty
 Some meaning now that Peace was safely booked.
 But meaning was there none for eye to see
 Or heart to know. Another fish was hooked,
 And that was all. Britannia with her prong
 Digs out her meal and hears no poet's song.

And Rubio lost patience and protested :
 " If you're a poet, go away and sing.
 The blackbird sings until his mate is nested
 And doesn't care a damn for anything,
 Though life is hard for birds, whose joy is tested
 By hawks and other Harmsworths on the wing."
 Though Noel's sorrow came from seeing Truth,
 'Twas hardened by the strain of love-lorn youth.

Soon khaki worship waned. The deluge came.
 The Rand had been revived by Chinese coolies.
 Indentured labour! Slavery! The shame
 Was too, too much for Manchester, whose rule is
 To play the Yankee's not the Southern game,
 The game so clearly shown by Mr Dooley's
 Philosophy—that is, to hold and bind
 Men everywhere by economic grind.

To bring Chineses and to feed them well,
 To give them money and no great expenses,
 This was the very policy of hell
 To holy Manchester, whose moral sense is
 Too keen for my immoral pen to tell.
 For Manchester its moral sense condenses
 In keeping wages low, expenses high,
 That men must slave in freedom till they die.

Between the systems Noel could not see
 An inch of difference, save that the last
 Gave greater room for smug hypocrisy,
 The flag which Manchester nails to the mast,
 Enslaving men, pretending they are free.
 The British Liberal can be aghast
 At men enslaved who know it and don't need
 The drugs of what the rich give them to read.

There will be slaves as long as there are men
 Who buy the lives, the work, the souls of others,
 As there are many underneath Big Ben
 Who buy the laws to subjugate their brothers
 And with their wealth control the scratching pen
 That breeds the lie which Truth and Freedom smothers.
 And British slaves were made to understand
 That slavery was rampant on the Rand.

Away then with the Tories and their frank
 Defiance of the Nonconformist cry!
 Away then with the military plank
 And back to Naval Britain's Liberty!
 For Peace and Freedom Britons have to thank
 The Navy. Let the estimates be high.
 Two keels to one. The Navy does not lead
 To making slaves of men who cannot read.

It certainly makes slaves of men who can.
 But that's too deep for British minds to follow.
 The Navy's somehow clean and Christian,
 A medicine that a sea-girt race can swallow—
 The tubs thumped for the beery Englishman
 Of course are most invariably hollow
 Because he's drunk the contents. Be it noted,
 On seas of beer the British Navy's floated.

Through all the uproar Noel felt a chill
 And icy stream of creeping terror running.
 'Twas like the silence of a conscience still
 While mind and passion are employed by cunning,
 The deadly silence which no sound can kill :
 Or like a creditor who's done with dunning
 And lets the anxious debtor run a while
 Until more debts are added to his pile.

And vainly through it all my Noel waited
 To hear some stirring of the heart. None came.
 The triumph of the polls was overrated.
 The Nonconformist vote put out the shame
 Of slavery upon the Rand, but stated
 No clause of Freedom, and in accents tame
 Repeated all the cant the Tories raised
 What time their eyes on Golden Afric gazed.

Some stirring of the head he heard, cold bubbles,
 The froth in citric-acid lemonade,
 The Fabians had diagnosed the troubles
 To be put right, and Sidney Webb had laid
 A scheme by which a novel Poor Law doubles
 The swollen staff that mans the Board of Trade.
 For Sidney Webb, like Milner, thought that life
 Just needed pruning with the expert's knife.

Experts, officials, Blue-books and reports
 A regimented world told how to live,
 And how to grapple simply with all sorts
 Of problems by resorting to the sieve
 Of offices. The old world played with forts,
 The new with bureaux plays, and it can give
 As little joy to men, who left alone
 Would quickly learn to make their lives their own.

But still we let *I dare not* wait upon
I would, still busy minds must hatch a plot
 To fill the gap between the two, and on
 The great world wags though men are shot
 And starved and tortured while the union
 Of these two thoughts is baffled by the rot
 That sets in through the horrible activity
 That comes from the most mischievous proclivity

Of barren minds which, while true minds are wooing,
 Steal in and bolt and bar the House of Love
 And empty it to all the world's undoing.
 Between *I dare not* and *I would* they shove
 The mischief that has been so long a-brewing
 Since Noah ope'd the window to the dove
 And thought himself so great for having found
 A way to keep the race from being drowned.

All this was written week by week in verse
 In Noel's paper by his Rubio,
 Who cut his thoughts according to the purse
 That paid him, and could regulate the flow
 Of words with which this Jew could bless or curse
 The Christians and their most Pagan show.
 His master's thoughts he turned into a chant
 Of gloomy woe, like Mr F. his aunt.

So this was London, gloom lit up with folly.
 A moneyed caste descended on the scene
 Like locusts, and ate up the rather jolly
 Well-mannered London there had always been.
 A London fit for Joels, Jack and Solly
 Now came to life, gilt, gaudy—aye, but mean.
 No house was big enough to hold these swells
 Who overflowed into the new hotels.

Machines again, machines to catch the rich
 And drain them dry as they had drained the poor,
 And make them useless for the purpose which
 Had made their power. Like the Koh-i-noor,
 The millionaire stood for a certain pitch
 Of wealth, but wealth within a cage. A ditch
 With pimperl and speedwell were far better.
 The spirit there is not bound by the letter.

The spirit in a hedgerow's like a flower
 And breathes its perfume to the loving air
 And knows itself the symbol of a power
 Far greater than the world between *I dare*
Not and *I would*, for in its happy hour
 It dares and wills and knows itself how rare
 It is, how precious, how far greater than the day
 Or night that sweeps the man-made world away.

The early hedgerows redden to the spring.
 Soon catkins come and tiny buds are green,
 Then violets blow and primroses all sing
 Their modest song to wake the sleeping scene.
 Birds take it up and girls their blushes bring
 To waken men to see the yet unseen.
 O! surely now in spring they will unbind
 Their eyes and no more go on being blind.

They'll surely see the glory through the eyes
 Of women and the rapture in the smile
 Of new young life, the ever-new surprise
 Upon an infant's face. They'll lose their guile
 In sheer enchantment as the vile disguise
 Falls off humanity that all this while,
 This long, long while, has laboured on
 To give poor fools their base dominion.

The fields are green with corn, the trees with may
 And chestnut red and white, the cattle browse
 And horses in the evening dart away
 So filled with winy air they must carouse
 And call the night up with a shrilling neigh,
 Birds sing, but huddled men down yonder house
 Their cares and hug them till they cannot feel
 The wonder that all other lives reveal.

'Tis wonderful to kill another man,
 'Tis wonderful to crush an enemy,
 'Tis wonderful to be a Christian
 And in another's sorrow to feel free.
 And wonderful it is with glee to scan
 The havoc wrought by wars for liberty.
 And when the enemy is soundly beaten
 'Tis great to be both drunk and overeaten.

"I've had enough," said Noel; "there is more
 In this than meets the eye. It is enough.
 Come, Rubio, we cannot hope to score
 O'er people dosed with sentiment, *quant. suff.*
 Somewhere must live the virtue I adore.
 I cannot stand this Nonconformist stuff.
 You shall not lose your job for you shall be
 My Sancho Panza and shall go with me.

"My Dulcinea's somewhere to be found.
 From Germany she wrote to me when I
 Had played the idiot. Her spirit round
 Me hovered and revealed the foolish lie
 By which the Clement-Cluny had me bound.
 I'll find her or I'll know the reason why.
 This London like a pirate ship is drunk,
 And like a pirate ship 'twill soon be sunk."

CANTO FOUR

CANTO IV

Poète, prend ton luth. O Poet, take
Thy lute and sing of Paris, where de Musset
Sang sweeter than the blackbird in the brake,
Where later on melodious Debussy
Built up a music for pure music's sake
Which put to shame great Wagner's rich and juicy
Theatrical confections, though I rather
Imagine he was Claude Debussy's father

In music. Sing, sweet poet, of the Quais,
The Luxembourg, the Louvre, the Trocadero,
For here upon the gloomiest of days,
The Jour des Morts, descended now my hero
With Rubio. A cold and noisome haze
Hung over Paris, gloomy, dark and drear. O!
For dark depression and for gloom abysmal
Than Paris no great city is more dismal.

But, Poet, sing and, please, my Muse, stand by,
For here you have a subject to your liking,
The Jour des Morts, the day that stands out high
Above the rest. The contrast is most striking.
The French are gay? The Poet cannot lie,
And when my Noel, ruddy as a Viking,
Strode through November Paris with his Jew
The city seemed to take a sable hue.

Sable is Paris, darkling as a stream
 Between its snowy banks. They do not know
 Their Paris who believe the thing they dream
 And only see what Paris cares to show.
 In Paris lives a faith that gives no gleam
 But smoulders with a dull and steady glow.
 Dull, steady, awful in its white-hot passion,
 No wonder Paris finds relief in fashion.

Hard by St Germain an *appartement*
À louer lured the travellers within.
 And Noel took it at a rent of *cent*
Vingt francs par mois. As clean as a new pin
 It was, and, as the *patronne* said, "*très elegant*."
 "By Jove!" said Noel, "here at last I'll win
 The peace of mind I've never once enjoyed
 Since my young love by England was destroyed.

"I like this Jour des Morts. It's something like
 The eating canker gnawing at my heart.
 You, Rubio, can do just as you like,
 But I am here to work and study art,
 For there I think I possibly may strike
 The trail I want." "If I can get a start,"
 Said Rubio, "I'll boom the new Entente,
 For that is what the British surely want.

"They think of Paris as a kind of sink
 Of women lost to shame and decency,
 Because the facts the British always blink
 Are dealt with here with open honesty.
 The British live unmindful of the stink
 Beneath their noses in their prudery.
 I'll write of Paris for the picture papers
 And make them see there's more in it than capers."

Now as he moved among the painters and
 The poets of the Left Bank Noel saw
 That here were men who tried to understand
 What they were doing, meant it, knew no law
 But their own passion for the selfless, grand
 Heroic squaring to the mighty awe
 Of Art wherein they found the hand of God
 To point the way that honest men have trod.

In that keen air the Philistine must die,
 As Heine knew when, shaking off the dust
 Of Göttingen, he made resolve to fly
 Across the Jordan-Rhine to break the crust
 That choked his soul until its bitter cry
 Broke in melodious song to mock the lust
 With which the Prussian threatened everything
 That took the air and lived upon the wing.

So Heine, like my Noel, winged his way
 (Like Wagner too) to Paris, where the thought
 Of all the race lives fearless of the day.
 For here the mind's great battles have been fought,
 Here men can think (and thinking is to pray),
 Here is the Grail that mindful men have sought,
 Here held aloft for men of every nation
 Who've shaken off the shackles of sensation.

But they are few, yet, congregating here,
 They do a generation's thinking for it,
 And never loose a thought until 'tis clear,
 So clear indeed that muddled minds abhor it,
 And cling to ancient formulæ for fear
 Their world should crack and nothing should restore it.
 A noble city, noble spirits built her
 To be mankind's invaluable filter.

All thoughts then lead to Paris, where they find
 New blinding thought to bring the revelation
 That there is always hope for humankind.
 So Noel found, and in his exaltation
 Looked round in quite another frame of mind
 From that which brought him so much irritation
 In London, where no mind can chew the cud
 And thought is trampled in the city's mud.

And, looking round, it was not long before
 A woman's form loomed most attractively
 Upon his vision. Though he roundly swore
 That he henceforth would pass all women by,
 The lovely Juliette Dupuy was more
 Attracted by him than she cared to be.
 She hated Englishmen and was betrothed
 To an old banker whom she warmly loathed.

There is, as Byron said, a tide in the
 Affairs of women. There's another when
 A man discovers in himself the sea
 Of his own thoughts. At such times men,
 Though vowed to a severe austerity,
 Just lose their new-found heads and then
 A woman who is swinging on her tide
 Can't help herself. They cannot but collide.

And so it was with Juliette. She said,
 In charming broken English, she could never
 Do what she quickly did when Noel read
 Her deep desire in spite of her endeavour
 To make her heart hark to her wiser head.
 Once it was done, then neither tried to sever
 The thread that bound them in their happiness
 Though Love came not their union to bless.

Still it was very pleasant. Through French eyes
 Young Noel learned to see the frugal France
 That out of ashes to the great surprise
 Of Europe rose once more to lead the Dance.
 A Dance of Death? Old Holbein's kindly eyes
 Saw Europe always to the pipe of chance
 In roundel, minuet, gavotte make play,
 While Death stood by and waited for his prey.

And while he learned to see he learned to hate
 The *rentiers, petits et grands*, who kept up
 The cosmopolitan and soulless State
 That into Paris recently had swept up
 The sweepings of the earth into the great
 Financial pool which had so slowly crept up
 And swamped old Paris. Juliette could tell
 A tale of wickedness surpassing well.

Her banker fiancé was a Brazilian
 Upon his mother's side, and all his friends
 (Not one of whom had less than half-a-million)
 Had come from all the corners, all the ends
 Of all the earth—Greek, Austrian, Sicilian,
 Levantine, Russian, and on such depends
 (Said Juliette) "*la destinée française,*
La gloire, l'honneur—rien ne leur apaise."

"*Rien ne leur apaise.*" They're like a flame
 That rushes over heather and parched grass
 Until the earth is but a blackened shame
 O'er which a decent soul must fear to pass.
 They know no country in their greedy game,
 But love of country moves the nameless mass
 Of men, and therefore love of country plays
 Its part to blind the guileless public gaze.

She loathed the thought of marriage with her banker ;
 But she was rich, her *dol* too great to be
 The portion of an ordinary ranker.
 So love must never be her ecstasy.
 Her ship must ever, ever ride at anchor
 And never could she bravely put to sea.
 "Dear Juliette," said Noel, "why not throw
 The whole thing over and away we'll go."

She visited him on Wednesdays in his room,
 And sometimes Sundays saw her lightly tripping
 Across the bridge to shed her growing gloom
 As down the slope of passion she went slipping.
 Love without passion is a common doom,
 But loveless passion is the sharpest whipping,
 The keenest scourge that life can hold for those
 Whose feelings can't be thrown off with their clothes.

Again a woman laid her country's soul
 Before my hero. Loveless passion burned
 His heart up till it was a lifeless coal,
 Or seemed like one, what time he hardly learned
 The desperation that can break the bowl
 Of life when sin its wages has well earned
 For blighting hopes and dragging men into
 A state in which they know not what they do.

The soul of France was in this loveless passion,
 This blind desire to scourge the flesh into
 The love it could not know, the soul to lash on
 Until it broke into a kind of dew,
 To fall upon the flesh to heal the gash on
 Which Death had licked his salt to keep it new
 And fresh for more and greater violence
 To satisfy the still unsated sense.

And this was France, this passion writhing under
 The gorgeous world of Paris that New York
 And London looked to as the greatest wonder
 Created since the advent of King Stork,
 Finance. This France would surely split asunder,
 Thought Noel, as champagne will force its cork
 Or burst its bottle if it's tapped too soon.
 This France will find another marching tune,

Another Marseillaise. For Juliette,
 In all the secret agony he guessed,
 He found a way to help her to forget.
 And sometimes almost she would have confessed
 That loveless passion had her in its net.
 But he was kind, his kindness all her rest,
 And though her soul was blistered with her shame
 To lie so much, she cried: "*Je l'aime ! Je l'aime !*"

O ouvriers du monde, unissez-vous !
 O workers of the world, unite ! These words,
 The challenge of the many to the few,
 Began to pass among the sweating herds
 Entrapped and sweated by the motley crew
 Against whom Marx so eloquently girds
 In his analysis, *Das Kapital*,
 Of thimble-rigging international.

When Juliette was weary in her soul,
 And blistered with her passion's loveless heat,
 And Noel found himself in such a hole
 As threatened e'en his judgment to unseat,
 Then he would try the socialistic rôle
 And take her to hear Jaurès for a treat.
 That orator could make them both oblivious
 Of all the torment of their thoughts lascivious.

For Noel there was more, but Juliette,
 A daughter of the *ancien régime*,
 Detested all the people. Her soul let
 No common thought be parcel of her scheme
 Of life. The mob was as a sea to fret
 The fringes of her high-born lady's dream.
 To fret in vain, since dreams they could not know
 But simply live for eating as they go.

Her dream was still the dream of Notre Dame
 And Chartres, and so she curled her lip
 At Jaurès' dream of industry and calm
 Co-operation, when the mob should strip
 The trimmings off its life and then embalm
 It in eternal peace. For her the whip
 Of passion was a greater thing than peace,
 And never would she have its blows to cease.

The martyrdom of France for her was law
 As changeless as the seasons or the sun,
 That France should have become the useful paw
 Of monkeys like her fiancé was one
 Of many signs that Heaven in its awe
 Would hold the glass until the sands were run,
 And France would suffer to sustain the glory
 Which just redeems the sordid human story.

O ouvriers du monde, unissez-vous !

Unite for what ? To work and sleep and eat ?
 To drink and talk and wive and breed and view
 A world grown duller than its dullest street ?
 To see it draped in grey and smoky hue,
 All colour gone, all form lost in the heat
 And grease and gas of working men grown fatter
 Since they're convinced that only wages matter ?

*" Ah ! Bah ! A bas ! Ça pue ! Ça sent l'eau sâle
 Que l'on éreinte d'un éponge ! L'effort
 Ne vaut la peine ! C'est pas un esprit mâle
 Ce Jaurès ! Non ! Il est aveugle au tort
 Que fait le peuple depuis la grande rafale
 De '89 ! Que veut il donc ? La mort
 Du peuple, et leur stupidité malsaine
 Nous ronge l'amour, nous livre à la haine."*

As Noel's French was rather weak he could not
 Quite understand the thoughts she thus gave vent.
 He asked her to translate, but that she would not,
 For only French could cover what she meant.
 He liked his Jaurès, though he understood not
 A quarter of his message's content.
 That Jaurès might be talking through his hat
 Was nothing to the proletariat.

Now whether Jaurès through his hat was talking,
 As Juliette so sceptically said,
 A sprite of fever through the land went stalking
 And Anarchy began to rear its head.
 Though law and order constantly are baulking
 That spirit, it still rises from the dead
 And bids the living plunge to find salvation
 Through hell on earth to 'void the last damnation.

La France ! La France ! To hear a French crowd cry
 Those words is terror to the heart. So deep,
 So passionate, so tigerish, so sly
 And cruel is it that the angels weep
 To hear it, and to see the years go by
 And France still Sisyphus upon the steep,
 Still straining at the rock of human reason
 Which for the rest is always out of season.

La France ! La France ! Deep from the belly came
 The growling cry as Jaurès whipped the mass
 Into a sense of all the creeping shame
 That in the Third Republic came to pass
 When it was sold to play the tricky game
 Of High Finance. Jaurès held up the glass
 Of candour to La France, La France gave tongue
 To all the rage that from her soul was wrung.

The railways are a modern nation's guts.
 A strike on them should do what Corday's knife
 In Marat's did—cut through the shortest cuts
 To freedom from the strangling of the life
 Of millions when the coach of State in ruts
 Is stuck and sense is lost in wordy strife.
 The nation's instinct of self-preservation
 Provoked a strike in icy desperation.

Paris stopped still ! The angry bourgeoisie
 Called for a massacre of all the vile
 Ungrateful wretches who refused to be
 Deceived by all the arts which them beguile
 (For bourgeois minds accept the knavery
 That governs them if it is worth their while).
 With each man's dossier upon their shelves
 The strikers were called up to slay themselves.

Conscription gives each man two entities,
 The shadow of a shadow he is made,
 And when he kicks against his miseries
 Then he is called to ply his soldier's trade
 To stop himself from kicking. Then he sees
 How futile is the game he bravely played.
 La France ! La France ! The roar soon died away
 Into the bleat for which the bourgeois pay.

"You see," said Juliette, "the silly sheep
 Are powerless. They're herded in a pen
 Locked with the pen. They cannot even keep
 Their passion up to turn them into men.
 It trickles out, and back the cowards creep,
 To be each one a docile citizen."
 So this, thought Noel, is their Liberté,
 Fraternité, Egalité! Ohé!

Eheu! Alas! This is democracy
 As it is understood in France, where still
 Men talk of Lafayette, but cannot see
 That Freedom needs a forging of the will
 Through more than physical adversity
 Before it has the power to fulfil
 Its prophecy made through the human heart
 When first it learned of beauty through its Art.

More fiercely through disgust did Juliette
 Cling to her Noel, though she clearly knew
 That she could never, never hope to get
 The love from him for which her hunger grew
 Insatiable. She floundered in the net
 With which some power had fished her from the blue
 And sunlit rippled water of her youth
 To feed on Noel's bulging store of ruth.

He maddened her because he was too kind,
 Too British for this very French affair.
 To all her subtlety his soul was blind,
 And when she wept he only kissed her hair
 And did not weep nor knock upon his mind
 As Frenchmen always do to please their fair.
 He knew she suffered, but was keen and jolly
 When she would have him sick and melancholy.

“*Tu n'es pas froid, ni méchant, ni stupide,*”
 She cried. “*Mais tu es lourd, moral, trop gai,*
Insouciant, et tu ne sens la vide,
La néant de l'amour. La Nuit de Mai
Pour toi est toute la vie, la lune rigide
T'enchanté, Nono. Does eet always stay
 Up there so cold, monotonous and bland
 To make you that you cannot understand?”

“*Oui, oui,*” said Noel, who could hardly say
 More in her language than plain Yes and No,
Eau chaude, and déjeuner, and poste and thé.
 “*Oui, oui,*” he said. “*Je sais, you know, I know,*
 For love like ours there is a price to pay.
 But I am not like my friend Rubio,
 Who pays in cash but loses all the joy
 Of fearless love like ours which cannot cloy.”

They turned to art and set out to explore
 The regions new discovered by Cézanne,
 Who then enjoyed a posthumous furore
 And was acclaimed as leader of the van
 In modern art, whose aim was to restore
 First principles as they were known to Man
 Before his senses learned to cheat his mind
 And make him both in sight and soul stone blind.

Matisse, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Picasso—
 These were the names that ran from lip to lip,
 And these the names that artful Rubio
 Made note of as a wind to sail his ship
 When, as he hoped to do, he'd make a show
 In London Town, that needed some such whip
 To keep its mind from going fast asleep
 To dream of Dreadnoughts on the vasty deep.

For Rubio had not for nothing thrown
 His fortunes in with Noel. He believed
 His master would come surely to his own,
 And something great through him would be achieved.
 He even saw my Noel on the throne
 Of England when the country was bereaved
 Of Edward, and himself he saw as the
 Great Jew to follow B. Disraeli.

The vulgar Paris of the Boulevards,
 The Magasins, Montmartre, l'Étoile, the shows
 Got up for tourists who from near and far
 Come yearly to enjoy what they suppose
 The daily pleasures of the city are—
 These they ignored, although a tender nose
 Cannot escape the pungent sickly smell
 Which makes that Paris worse than I can tell.

Americans, said Oscar Wilde, all go
 To Paris when they die if they are good.
 And they are wise, for Paris life can show
 A clearer glimpse of Heaven than a wood
 In spring or than a mountain peak in snow
 Or than the starry smile of babyhood.
 The innocence of Paris you'll believe
 If you will look at Puvis' Genevieve.

Most saintly is she as she gazes down
 Upon her city, calm and sure. She dreams
 Of the security of its renown
 Through all the changes watered by its streams.
 Not all its evil can call forth a frown
 Upon her brow, for through its evil teems
 The light that floods the city and its name,
 And keeps its glory shining through its shame.

To die and go to Paris, there to meet
 Great Abelard and Heloïse ; these two
 Keep life with passion pure and very sweet ;
 And François Villon, Ronsard and the true
 Most noble Pascal, Voltaire in the street
 That bears his name ; and Rabelais. Can you
 Desire more, you Christians who pine
 Somehow, somewhere to find a life divine ?

I cannot. There's Corneille and Molière,
 And Racine, Diderot ; their names are light
 Itself, the clear warm light that makes the air
 A wine most potent to dispel the blight
 Descended on the world from places where
 Such men have never been, the appetite
 For lies to check by forcing down the truth
 On nations bent on poisoning their youth.

They forge th'unbroken chain of thought
 Whereon are threaded all men's victories
 In other fields, and triumphs nigh unsought,
 Since they must follow in the wake of these
 The pioneers, who in themselves have fought
 The battles of humanity to please
 No man or woman but the mighty spirit
 Which all men should but few men do inherit.

Perceiving which, young Noel found he'd grown up.
 The books he read with Juliette made plain
 So many facts that he at last must own up,
 And say that he must start his life again.
 With her emetic he had simply thrown up
 Just like a child, the things that gave him pain,
 And like a child he turned to her to ease
 The gnawing pain of seeing what he sees.

The moony light of youthful love had hid
 So much in shadow that his thoughts were ghosts
 To flit from gloom to gloom while he bestrid
 With youthful joy the nigh unending hosts
 Of men and women straining at the lid
 That kept them in their hell where Satan roasts
 Their bodies in the lewdness of desire
 To make them ripe for his eternal fire.

This Roman ideology grew clearer
 To Noel when with Juliette he heard
 The music which to Paris had been dearer
 Than even beauty in the written word.
 For in it Frenchmen had come vastly nearer
 The soul of ancient France since they incurred
 In '70 the debt imposed by Bismarck,
 Who took Alsace by way of leaving his mark.

It was as though the French had said to Prussia,
 You're welcome to your mighty Emperors.
 We've tried them. They're as out of date as Russia.
 We've had enough of such conquistadors.
 Now it shall be our steadfast aim to usher
 The Modern Spirit down the corridors
 Of Time. Your war will end by making you sick.
 We'll take what you have now relinquished—music.

And as they said so it was done. In peace,
 The peace past understanding, César Franck
 Made music which seemed like another lease
 Of hope, though none would listen and none thank
 Him for it and his power to increase
 The sum of human wealth, although a bank
 Would look askance at such security,
 Producing neither interest nor fee.

In music Juliette and Noel found
 Some reconciliation of their aims,
 At last, above the earth, some common ground
 Where they could stand together 'mid the flames
 Which they saw leaping everywhere around
 Them as they found the love that tames
 All selfish love and breaks the arrogance
 With which it leads poor mortals such a dance.

Meeting that love, the love that Dante knew
 For Beatrice, their eyes met and they smiled
 A slow, sad smile to know that for them two
 That love was not, and they had been beguiled
 By charm, by passion and a longing for the new
 Among the weary people who defiled
 With their much boredom everything they touched,
 And ever at new marvels snatched and clutched.

Le sport, le football Anglais, five-o'clock,
 And aeroplanes and motor cars and racing,
 Le cinema, le boxe, et l'équivoque
 Angliche were introduced by way of gracing
 The Entente Cordiale, that mighty rock
 On which King Edward Europe's peace was basing,
 With some support from Russia, as we'll see,
 To make quite sure there'd be a victory.

But no one thought of war, except the men
 Who make their living by it—they are many.
 They think of nothing else, and make the pen
 In peace time catch the ever-vagrant penny,
 To pay for preparations for the *When*
 Which some mistake will bring. Now are there any
 Still left prepared most hotly to deny
 That war was ever dreamed by an Ally?

War's fetid wind went rustling every day
 Through Paris, and so stupefied the mind
 That none could think and none could seek a way
 By which the evil thing could be defined,
 Tracked down, dissolved and kept from mortal clay.
 Cold from the Russian steppes the bitter wind
 Blew poison westward, till the Western soul
 Grew sick and faint and lost from view its goal.

Le sport, le boxe, le cricket, le High-Life,
 These filled the world for Juliette Dupuy
 And the Brazilian whose jewelled wife
 Her people had contracted she should be.
 This bored her till her boredom like a knife
 Cleft her poor heart, which ached in misery.

*"L'amour, l'amour, je suis une amoureuse
 Et dans mon âme le ver, le ver se creuse."*

Poor Cleopatra, how she loved her asp !
 To feel at last within her jewelled hand
 The worm. At last to hold it in her grasp,
 The gnawing pain to ease which Egypt's land
 Was held within a hostile army's clasp,
 Long agony made visible, no grand
 And mighty thing, but cold, a slimy thing
 That ate into her soul and broke its wing.

When wingless life has naught to give the soul
 It aches for death, though still it hopes for healing,
 Being all hope. Now Juliette took toll
 Of what she was, her inmost self revealing
 As slowly all her life began t'unroll
 Before her eyes, no single phase concealing.
 A lover—lost, a husband—lost, a lover,
 Another yet that lover lost to cover—

That was her mother's life, the common lot,
 Though whether it is worse than being tied
 To one dull righteous man I'd rather not
 Be called upon, dear Reader, to decide.
 Nor am I sure but that the Hottentot
 Is wiser when he buys with cows a bride
 Whene'er he wants one, though I fiercely hate
 That any man should buy a woman's fate.

Must women only live and think through men,
 And to their dullness tune their sharper wits?
 They must not and they shall not if my pen
 Can only reach the level meet for its
 Responsibility and bring again
 The skill with which a proper woman fits
 Her life and love together and goes free
 By giving to her man his liberty.

A lover is conceived and must be born
 Through her he loves. The miracle of birth
 Must find its echo in the smiling morn
 Of true love in a love-lit woman's mirth.
 Without this all his life's a thing of scorn,
 Just comic in its miserable dearth.
 One moment with the loved one is enough
 To turn a man into divinest stuff.

Ethereal, aerial his spirit,
 No height too high for him to top on wings;
 No depth too deep for him then to inherit
 Where joy bursts forth in still unnumbered springs.
 No question here of morals or of merit,
 For joy is always his whose passion sings
 Its way through every snare and every danger
 Set out to catch the fearless, reckless ranger.

That was the feeling which in Noel flickered
 As he reacted from his Juliette.
 And when they quarrelled and she snarled and bickered
 He smiled and said there was one way to get
 Her freedom from her Banker, who, well-liquored,
 Was kind to her as to a parlour pet,
 But in more sober moments made her see
 Her beauty was his private property.

That way was simple. Noel said he'd wed.
 "Non, non !" said she. "Oui, oui !" said he. "*Je vais*
Me marier chez toi." They were in bed,
 For it was on a stolen Saturday.
 They argued hotly, but she lived in dread
 Of what the Holy Mother Church would say,
 For though a most intelligent young woman
 Her thoughts upon this subject were sub-human.

She could *not* think of marriage and the sexes,
 Her thought had been laid down for her long since
Au couvent, and the subject which perplexes
 So much of life could never make her wince
 From her unreason, for the Church indexes
 For adolescence where it should convince
 With argument and scientific fact
 Administered, of course, with taste and tact.

He talked so easily of breaking free,
 He who had been in Africa the child
 Of sun and air. To him his liberty
 Was like his breathing, sweet and undefiled
 By the contamination he could see
 Corrupting Europe. With her passion wild
 It seemed to him that Juliette could throw
 Discretion to the winds and jilt her beau.

But she was bound. Her mind could not consent
 To what she did and yet she did it. That
 Will always be the way of women bent
 On marrying a soulless plutocrat
 Without incurring hopeless banishment
 From what her simpler sisters would be at.
 She would not marry Noel, yet she would not
 Desist from talking stuff he understood not.

So there was war, a desperate long duel
 In which his British kindliness was worsted,
 For she could be and he could not be cruel,
 And for his cruelty she hotly thirsted,
 As women do when they have lost the jewel
 Of wedded love and seen their lives so bursted
 That there's no hope of winning back again
 The joy that is triumphant over pain.

Noel grew thin, emaciated, grey,
 And Rubio, his courage in his hand,
 Protested that his master should not pay
 So dearly for his sojourn in this land
 Where women far too often have their way
 And eat up those who do not understand
 The technique of the passionate affairs
 Which take the place of love that lasts and wears.

The Jew in Rubio detested her,
 The plutocratic Catholic who dragged
 His master through this intrigue sinister
 In which his joyous spirit paled and flagged,
 And from the joyful eager messenger
 Of Love transformed him to a soul that sagged
 Just like a currant cake ill cooked and moist.
 With her own petard was she shortly hoist.

The faithful Jew informed her fiancé
 Of her too frequent tender assignations,
 And the Brazilian upon a day
 Rudely disturbed their gloomy meditations
 Upon the fire that burns in mortal clay.
 He did not waste much time on explanations,
 But challenged there and then the Englishman
 Who dared insult a French Brazilian.

To cleanse the lady's honour these two fought
 Upon a day of springtime loveliness
 In Fontainebleau, where Noel oft had sought
 In lonely walks the spirit that can bless
 The aching heart which has too fiercely fought
 To keep its wonder in the throng and press.
 "The heart's a wonder," cried the poet Synge
 When with his satire he had had his fling.

In Fontainebleau the ghosts of kings and queens,
 Great courtiers and courtesans are known
 To keep their state beneath the budding green
 When violets and celandine are blown.
 They live and move in the enchanted sheen
 That springtime round the woods has thrown.
 They move like figures in a tapestry,
 So softly, silently and gracefully.

They move and yet are still and seem to wait
 For all their world to come to join their revelry,
 For grosser mortals with their clumsy gait
 To wake their royal stillness with their devilry,
 As once they did in time when Royal State
 Maintained its splendour with high chivalry.
 But grosser mortals pass and do not know
 The living greatness in the springtime glow.

The green buds burst and all things exquisite
 That ever lived in immortality
 Of joy join in the seasons as they flit
 And bear things mortal off upon the sigh
 Of autumn winds rejoicing to be quit
 Of men who will not live before they die.
 In Fontainebleau's enchantment Noel saw
 Old Europe pass in mediæval awe.

The Roi Soleil and Richelieu and Madame
 With lords and ladies flitted through the shimmer,
 And old Saint-Simon noted down the Adam
 Unchastened working in the golden glimmer
 About these personages. Noel bade 'em
 Stop, speak, but as the greenish light grew dimmer
 They passed away from stillness into magic,
 Beyond the region where this life is tragic.

But others came, as Marie Antoinette
 And Louis XVI., with shepherds, silken-clad,
 Who piped and danced a rural minuet
 And made to be as peasants grossly glad,
 Sweet mummary to help them to forget
 The days of riot when they had run mad
 And drunk too deeply of the heady wine,
 The blood of France that nourishes the vine.

Transfigured, Noel stood in Fontainebleau.
 The nightmare of his Paris days was swept
 In this enchanted moment's morning glow
 Into oblivion, and from his soul there crept,
 Refreshed, renewed, the power again to know
 The truth that for her chosen Life has kept.
 These perfect moments are the flower of all,
 Who misses them is damnèd in his fall.

He turned to Rubio and in amazement
 "Did you not see?" he cried. "Did you not see?
 The marching of those figures through the haze meant
 That nothing dies if once its soul is free."
 "You're ill," said Rubio, to whom his phrase meant
 Exactly nothing. "You are ill, and we
 Are in a sorry plight, for here's the other
 And with him is Miss Juliette's young brother."

They came with swords and bandages and brandy,
 A doctor, and their breakfast in a basket.
 Their faces looked as though with sugar-candy
 Their teeth were stuck. Each face was like a mask. It
 Was an occasion ripe for Toby Shandy
 And honest Trim, good Trim who held the casket
 Of so much English humour in his head—
 But English humour like so much is dead.

M. Dupuy and M. Garcia
 De Garros de Fuego-Clément-If
 Stood cold and still some twenty yards away
 With Latin scowls upon the British thief,
 What time the seconds argued the affray
 Which now for Noel was beyond belief.
 Why should he fight this man with many names?
 It seemed to him the silliest of games.

Most foolish was it in the prime of morn,
 When dewdrops hung upon the spider's thread,
 When through the veil a gaping hole was torn
 To show the quickness of the joyous dead
 Who beckon on the legions yet unborn
 To greater life than that from which they fled:
 Most foolish in the green of Fontainebleau
 To think of death or making blood to flow.

If M. Garcia etcetera
 Still loved his Julie, might he not forgive?
 That would be harder and more worthy a
 Brazilian who might expect to live
 With her in peace by such a gentle way
 Of passing past offences through the sieve
 Of Time's oblivion, but jealousy
 Still keeps alive the forms of chivalry.

And gazing on the bold Brazilian
 (For so he was, and hairy like an ape)
 Our hero saw the cosmopolitan
 As Hamlet saw the dread fantastic shape,
 His father's ghost, revealing all the plan
 To make graves yawn and Europe's churchyards gape.
 A thing unclean, from whom had come the rust
 To bring the soul of Juliette to the dust.

He saw his adversary as the worm
 That gnawed at Fancy, Truth, Religion,
 To make the captive souls of women squirm
 And seek in vain their heart's companion.
 Long since in London Noel had been firm
 That he'd not go where so much good had gone.
 And here in Fontainebleau's green haze
 He'd seen the glory of old France ablaze.

"You have a cold," said Rubio. "You must not
 Take off your coat." "No, no, I never was
 So well. . . . With sword shall be discussed not
 The question whether stainlessly shall pass
 A foolish woman taught at last to lust not,
 But which of us shall lie dead on the grass."
 He spoke in English, but Dupuy had heard
 And told his friend the risk he had incurred.

"Cet Angliche là est furieux et fou. . . .

"J'espère qu'il ne se sait pas en escrime. . . ."

The doctor thought of what he ought to do
If one were killed. But Noel in a dream
Imagined this another Waterloo
To make this modern tyrant kick the beam,
A tyrant who with hordes of wretched clerks
Upon the conquest of the world embarks.

And Rubio was terrified and wept
And rushed across to where the seconds stood.
He saw how M. Garros-If had swept
His enemy with hatred from the wood
With one swift glance and towards him slowly crept,
Correct in every fencer's attitude.
But Noel rushed, sprang, lunged and wildly thrust
His sword in till it seemed as though it must

Impale the great apostle of Finance.
But he was pricked. He fell and groaned a groan
That must have wakened half the cocks in France
And all the dogs, for they set up a moan
That made the leaves upon the trees all dance,
And turned my Noel's beating heart to stone.
When cruel Nature triumphs over feeling
The heart comes near its inmost truth revealing.

The spell was broken. Trees were only trees,
And dewdrops broke and spider threads were seen
No more. The cold light of the sun 'gan freeze.
The very violets and celandine,
Whose modesty come shyly up to please,
Were hidden now in the excessive green.
At last young Noel found his voice and said :
"Is he alive?" The doctor bowed his head.

“O God!” cried Noel. “How came this to pass?
 What demon lived in me to take sincerely
 This little mimic conflict on the grass?
 I seemed to see so much so very clearly,
 Although I cannot tell you what it was.
 If he is dead, then I have paid too dearly
 For all I’ve learned in suffering and anguish
 Of women who in loveless passion languish.

“A man may be an evil thing and yet
 He is a man, too great a thing for men
 To judge.” They took poor M. If and set
 Him on his feet to totter through the glen
 Towards the little low estaminet
 Where they had left their taxi. Noel then
 Was slightly reassured, and donned his coat—
 The kindest man who ever cut a throat.

His conscience throbbed and, being conscientious—
 Too conscientious—off he went to call
 Upon his Juliette, from whose contentious
 And very Gallic nature issued all
 This pother, for had she been more abstentious
 She never would have seen her Garros fall
 A victim to the outworn code of honour
 Whose consequences now descended on her.

Noel explained in honest British fashion
 What he had done and what proposed to do.
 He told her of the strange exalted passion
 Which drove him on until he crashed right through
 Convention’s ice to let his fury dash on
 To kill the false and liberate the true.
 But to his horror Juliette grew pale
 And shuddered as he told his breathless tale.

She called him "*Assassin !*" as ladies cry
 In dramas at the Porte St-Martin, and
 She hugged her breast and clutched her hair, and dry
 And glassy were her eyes, what time her stand
 She took upon approved morality.
 She curled her lip and bit her jewelled hand
 And cried in scorn: "The English are all mad,
 But you are worse. You're both insane and bad."

This was no time for heated argument,
 No time for dialectical debate,
 And Noel felt he had been too long pent
 In passion which could ill conceal its hate.
 If this is what upon the Continent
 They make of love, he thought, then surely Fate
 Must have some fearful vengeance up its sleeve,
 For man you can but Fate you can't deceive.

Still more had Juliette Dupuy to say to him.
 Ice-cold, she called him, and perfidious
Perfide Albion ! She'd given way to him
 Although he was *au fond* ridiculous,
 Like all the English. Then she said good-day to him,
 As though there'd never been the slightest fuss.
 "Leave me," she said, "to mourn my noble dead !"
 Aghast at such hypocrisy, he fled.

What was it made these women fly into
 His life like moths into a candle or
 Like bats into a lighted window? Who
 Can tell what women ever struggle for
 Or why they wish their lovers to be true
 When they are not themselves? The Toison d'or
 Led Argonauts upon a voyage hapless,
 And women in their voyages are mapless.

Or so it seemed to Noel, who was wrecked
 In Paris as in London he had been,
 Because he'd let its villainy infect
 The youthful joy he'd won at seventeen,
 When Love had made him one of the elect
 To dominate the transitory scene
 Where most of us are merely pawns or cogs
 In the machine which human folly clogs.

He sought out Rubio and told him that
 He'd broken with the lady. "*Gott sei Dank*,"
 Said Rubio. "'Twas I who put the fat
 Into the fire. This woman's conduct stank
 Of modern Paris, and I acted pat
 Just in the nick of time before you sank,
 Although perhaps you are a Salamander
 In Europe's heat, you joyous Afrikander."

Then Rubio laid bare that he had news
 Of Katje through a friend of his who taught
 At the Conservatoire, and several clues
 He had to help in finding whom they sought,
 The love which is as healing as the dews
 Of English April when the spring has taught
 New life, new joys to break the winter weather
 And bind in song all budding songs together.

In Paris? No. She had been there a while,
 And all adored her for the liquid grace
 In all her gestures, in her childish smile
 That touched with gold the wisdom in her face.
 And Noel groaned and felt he had been vile
 To let his limbs be tethered to the pace
 Of slavish women, dark and cold of heart,
 Who lived upon the fever of the mart.

He had been young and over-chivalrous,
 A bond-slave to the wreckage of his life,
 And dazed by Europe with its ominous
 Oppressive shadow looming up with strife.
 He'd been a fool to let the women fuss
 About him when at heart he had a wife.
 And now in Paris he had killed a man,
 If so you call a French Brazilian.

They packed. They sold his lease and furniture
 And caught the night express to Basle, where runs
 The River Rhine, whose nymphs were glad, I'm sure,
 To see my Noel come among the Huns.
 They sang their glee to see so young and pure
 A spirit come to soar above the guns
 With which the Germans learned to do their thinking
 From Bismarck, who could slaughter without blinking.

Urvater Rhein! You growled a welcome too
 As Noel crossed the frontier and said
 Farewell to France and *Herzensgruss* to you
 In whom there live so many noble dead.
Urvater Rhein, if men would only woo
 Your spirit more you would not run so red
 As you have done these many generations
 Since on your banks were lined the foolish nations.

Low lay the clouds upon the mountain ranges
 As Noel and his Jew in their hotel
 Surveyed the lovely scene that never changes
 While change in men evolves a changing Hell.
 When Heaven is so near what seems so strange is
 That men can't make the effort to be well
 And sane and comradely and kind enough
 To take the smooth and tolerate the rough.

And here we leave our Quixote in reaction
 On neutral ground against the tortured France
 In which he'd found so little satisfaction
 In probing underneath her elegance.
 We let him breathe at ease before the action
 Of this our epic makes him once more dance
 Before the rising waves of Europe's storm
 Destroys its life and shatters its old form.

We leave him gazing at the mountain peaks
 And musing with the Rhine, who shares his deep
 And ancient wisdom with the soul that speaks
 Its knowledge out and not a thought will keep
 Sealed up in silence, but its inmost seeks
 And brings it forth, not fearing for to weep
 Or laugh in such assuring company
 As Father Rhine with wisdom running free.

Wise are the mountains, wise the tender snows
 That veil their rising summits from the sun.
 And wise the dandelion and the rose,
 The gentian blue as eyes lit up with fun
 In babyhood. And wise the stream that flows
 From all this wisdom till its tale is done
 And lost in the unfathomed wisdom of the ocean
 So deep and still beneath its wind-blown motion.

Wise are all these ! How foolish then are men
 With so much show maintaining all their folly !
 A poet should write wisdom with his pen.
 But where to find it ? There's the melancholy
 Inexorable fact, that thwarts me when
 I'd like to be just musical and jolly.
 The wisdom of a poet cannot thrive
 When folly in his fellows is alive.

Still, Muse, my dear, we'll take our promised flight
 Above the mountains, higher than the stars,
 For we could fly when Mr Wilbur Wright
 Was floundering and getting full of scars.
 We'll fly beyond the source of day and night,
 And leave my fellows to the bolts and bars
 Which they so love that they will fight and slay
 Rather than walk out freely in the day.

Men won't be free, because they are afraid
 Of Freedom's high responsibility,
 And of the fateful wages which are paid
 For sin well sinned and joy enjoyed with glee.
 But you and I, my Muse, were never made
 To be imprisoned in such misery.
 The perfume of a violet can give
 Our souls the joy on which they fiercely live.

High is our flight in ecstasy to wake
 Delight to be consumed by the waves
 Of music raging from the gods to break
 The thickened crust upon a world of slaves
 Who will not hear the bird upon the brake
 Much less the windy music from the caves
 Of Time, where songs are born but lose their way
 Among the stars that smile on mortal clay.

They smile because they see this wretched Earth
 As just a little twinkler like themselves.
 If they could see the miserable dearth
 Of joy with which poor Adam digs and delves
 And Eve dries up his failing source of mirth,
 What time the fruit of all his work she shelves,
 They'd look away and never shine again
 And nothing do to ease our mortal pain.

God rest you, Noel, here in Switzerland.
 Wait in the land of waiters till I feel
 That I am strong enough to try my hand
 Upon the folk who make the iron heel
 Just bearable (*Hoch! Hoch! Dem Vaterland*)
 With beer and sausage and kultur, the meal
 Which every German gorges every day
 In gratitude to Berlin on the Spree.

Consider Switzerland, and Thomas Cook
 (A greater than the Captain), Henry Lunn,
 And William Tell—three names upon the Book
 Of Fame engraved until the tale is done.
 All helped to make this little sheltered nook
 A place to which the persecuted run.
 And here by the pellucid Lake Geneva
 Young Noel met with exiles from the Neva.

Here I must pause to doff my hat and take
 My grateful heart out from my panting breast
 That can no longer hold it, while I make
 My tribute to Voltaire, whose exile blest
 The rather chromolithographic lake,
 Where Rousseau dreamed and was the Muses' guest.
 What can I say? What need I say indeed?
 The man was sixty when he wrote *Candide*.

I'll ask the old man's ghost if he would mind
 My introducing to his *Ingénu*
 My Noel, for they're heroes of one kind,
 Who unconcerned do what they want to do
 And do not understand the rules that bind
 Such timid halting folk as me and you.
 The old man said: "All right, but go ahead
 And let me be to try to save the dead

"From the illusion which so utterly destroyed
 Their life on earth, where death was all their truth
 And nothing else by beauty was enjoyed,
 And old age tried to force its death on youth.
 When I still walked in flesh I was employed
 In crying havoc on such lack of youth."
 The Ingénu and Noel were delighted
 To meet each other in this place benighted.

For Rubio had met a Russian friend,
 A Jew from Spital Square who'd killed his man
 Good-humouredly in Moscow to defend
 The Revolution which he'd hoped would pan
 Out like the French, a broken world to mend.
 He'd blown to dust a great Caucasian
 Who knew too much of what Young Russians harp on,
 And also had corrupted Father Gapon.

"My master's killed a rich financier
 In Paris!" Rubio declared with glee.
 "I see th'affair has made a little stir
 And famous now is Juliette Dupuy.
 But no one even knows the name of her
 Inamorata. All because of me.
 I blew the gaff because I had to bust
 The woman who abused my master's trust."

"Da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da!"
 Exclaimed the Russian. "That was very good.
 The French finance the Tsar, whose opera
 Is all he has to show for Russian blood
 Poured out to pay his interest. Ah! ha!
 A French capitalist! Destroy the brood
 Who carry on as though the Corsican
 Were not *démodé* by the Marxian

"Apostolate, of whom I and my friends,
 Who've also killed their man, are humble members,
 All pledged to see that to its farthest ends
 Europe shall burn and crumble into embers.
 It's bound to come; how soon of course depends
 On men like us, whose bitterest Decembers
 Yet hold the germ of spring to blossom forth
 As soon it will up in the blood-soaked north.

"The workers of the world have naught to lose
 Except their chains. Class-consciousness will grow
 Until at last the workers will refuse
 To labour on, while idle spendthrifts throw
 Their work away in striving to amuse
 Themselves. . . ." "Da, da. Yes, yes," said Rubio,
 Who knew all that and so refused to let
 His friend explain the Marxiste alphabet.

The lamentable death of M. If
 Was a credential here, and Noel found
 Among these people kindness past belief,
 Though tempered somewhat with their not quite sound
 Mentality, which made them see a thief
 In every man who could produce a pound
 At will, for they, poor things, had not a bean
 With which to win the vision they had seen.

Long-haired the men, short-haired the women, who
 Talked less but felt the more, and ghostly glared
 Upon the world whose crimes they would review
 At any length to anyone who cared.
 In Switzerland they'd nothing else to do.
 So long they'd been in exile, all prepared
 For Revolution which they knew would come
 To clear the lake of Europe of its scum.

A Dostoieffsky novel is not more
 Loquacious than a Russian who will talk,
 As other men get drunk, to help restore
 Their courage to surmount the ills that baulk
 Their generous desires. And here a score
 Of Russians talked until they could not walk.
 In cafés nightly talked and talked until
 Some kindly person came to pay the bill.

When Noel paid their bill they talked again
 For five days at a stretch to such a hearer,
 An Afrikander innocent and plain
 Of thought, to whom their tale was a Chimera,
 A mystic myth that hurt his puzzled brain
 So that he sometimes asked them to be clearer.
 And then they talked, expecting him to pay
 For what they ate, what time they had their say.

He paid, and on they rushed, their eyes imploring
 Him with his youthful joy to take the lead,
 And wake poor Europe from its age-long snoring,
 Drugged with a most misapprehended creed.
 "We Russians find your Europe very boring,
 We cannot find in it the thing we need.
 We want to be good Europeans, but
 The door on Goethe's Europe has been shut.

"What can we do we Russians who are not
 A nation but a congerie of races?
 We want a culture, but it must be HOT,
 And we don't want the Yellow man's embraces.
Au contraire, we would let ourselves be shot
 Rather than woo this present Europe's graces.
 Quite definitely we will not be Prussian,
 But there is nothing in us purely Russian.

“We sit in cafés till we’re paralysed.
 There’s nothing we can do except in print,
 And that in Russia’s censored and revised
 Until it hardly gives a single hint
 Of what we really mean. And we have sized
 The situation up so often that no glint
 Of practical good sense appears in what
 We say and say again in this dull spot.”

And Noel felt their gloom begin to creep
 Into his bones, until he could not stir
 Or feel or act, and everything in sleep
 Was sunk except his brain, and that would whirl
 Like a machine with no man there to keep
 It clean, or to prevent the fluffy fur
 Of dust and rust that gathered in upon it,
 And choked the thought the Russians had laid on it.

Most horrible! His mortal eye could see
 Mont Blanc and nothing else, what time the eye
 Of his immortal soul, which used to be
 So keen that it was never bounded by
 Things human, but could see eternity
 Through all the farce played out in misery
 Which men call Life, saw nothing but the steppes
 Of Russian talk from Marxiste demireps.

They’d been in prison. Prison was their mind,
 As Companies and Trusts are all the thought
 Of Western Europe. Prison still could bind
 Their souls as surely as if they had bought
 Machines to do the work they owed mankind.
 In Prison they had found the thing they sought,
 What all men seek in modern life, a trick
 With which to snuff their candle’s too long wick.

A prison's a machine with which to give
 Unsocial men some social sense, and make
 Them realise they have no right to live
 Except for some community's dear sake.
 In modern life no man's a fugitive.
 There's no escape, and every man must take
 The plunge and let machinery defame
 His brains until his manhood's but a name.

Successful men wreak havoc with their deeds,
 With words the unsuccessful drench their lives.
 Mankind is one huge belly whose gross needs
 Must be supplied, though nothing lovely thrives,
 And everything that lives for beauty bleeds,
 And Freedom pines in manacles and gyves.
 Mankind is one huge belly that devours
 Love, lovers and their delicatest flowers.

Hotels and prisons! What a world! Escape?
 "I must escape," thought Noel, and he fled
 To ease his mind of the fantastic shape
 Assumed by Man since human souls were dead,
 While animate machines committed rape
 Upon Society so grievously misled.
 Hotels and prisons! All to fill these two
 Were poor and rich, the many and the few.

Up to the mountains Noel fled alone.
 Alone! To be alone, upon the mountains bare,
 To touch the cold and unrelenting stone,
 The solid stone, to breathe the eager air.
 Here on the mountains life seemed all his own,
 A step upon the never-ending stair
 That leads to God, upon whose knees are laid
 The souls of these whose love was not afraid.

How beautiful upon the mountains are
 The feet of them that bring glad tidings ! None
 Found Noel on Mont Blanc though near and far
 He gazed in childish expectation.
 None save himself the virgin snow did mar,
 And he was forced to see that One is One
 And all alone and ever more shall be so.
 We all must reap in time the tares that we sow.

And Noel reaped his now as he perceived
 No feet upon the mountains which became
 A challenge to himself who vainly grieved
 To see so little light come from the flame
 Of passion's joy in which he had believed.
 He reaped his tares in agony and shame,
 Then piled them up and burned them with the fire
 Of purer joy and still untouched desire.

How comforting the silence and the snow
 Away from men who act and live and talk,
 But never think that always what they know
 And what they do are different as chalk
 From cheese ! How comforting to throw
 All social thought aside and freely walk
 Full of the healing air with sunlight thrown
 From snow and sky ! How good to be alone !

Though men build cities and create a world,
 Still to the earth Man's love must ever turn,
 Else in a prison is his spirit curled :
 His love and all it makes its own must burn,
 Must be destroyed and into chaos whirled.
 Only from Earth can human passion learn
 Creation and the power to increase
 The joys wherewith the soul can live at peace.

Here in the mountains moulded by the sun
 New earth is made and carried by the rivers
 Which to the sea from snowy caverns run.
 So too the soul that out of selfhood shivers
 Pours down its joy in being fiercely One
 And all alone to animate the livers
 In cities, cramped by law, who need this Earth
 Before they can bring any joy to birth.

But Noel was too young for long reflection ;
 He swiftly knew the thing he wished and plunged
 And never wasted time in mere dejection.
 Past sorrows from his soul were quickly sponged,
 And naught was left for intimate dissection.
 So down he flew and into life he lunged,
 Forgetful of the hurts that it had yielded
 Him when his sword of youth he'd wielded.

He held it now more firmly, and it shone
 And gleamed like Arthur's sword Excalibur.
 "Come, Rubio!" he said, "let us begone.
 Let's go where life's alive and there's a stir
 Of hope in men of more than putting on
 A mental attitude, as they prefer,
 To face the Nothing which contains the whole
 Of human life—except the human soul."

"The human soul," said Rubio, "has left
 The human race. Its job is gone. Its work
 Is now done by machinery which deft
 And nimble artisans attend, who shirk
 As much as possible, since they're bereft
 Of the old pride which freed them from the irk
 Of ceaseless toil. They toil unceasingly
 To help machines to breed machinery.

And Noel laughed. Not while the mountains stand,
 Not while the snows in rivers reach the sea,
 Not while the roses blossom in the land,
 Not while the birds maintain their minstrelsy,
 Not while the lover holds his loved one's hand,
 Not while true lovers take in ecstasy
 Their more than Freedom, can the soul of Man
 Be driven out by any social plan.

For men are singers sweeter far than all
 The melody of field and wood and brake.
 The soul of Man in song will ever call,
 And men will answer though they pine and ache
 And go so blindly, stumble on and fall
 Into a sleep so fast that none can wake
 Their senses to the slow and sly disaster
 That creeps upon them, all their hopes to master.

Men sing as children smile because they know
 The light that in them lives and radiance
 Outpours for everything that seems to show
 Its light to them in happy, happy chance.
 Men sing and laugh, aye, even when they go
 Beneath the shadow of Death's countenance.
 They sing because it is not worth the trouble
 To take quite seriously this life's bubble.



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